



Attitudes Toward Inclusion of LGBTQ+ Youth in Agricultural Education: Q Methodology Study

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Abstract

Although research indicates school-based agricultural education teachers work to make classrooms more inclusive, some teachers may not feel prepared to support LGBTQ+ youth. The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of agricultural education teachers about the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in agricultural education. The 38-statement Q set was sorted by 21 Oklahoma agricultural education teachers. The resulting attitudes from the three-factorial solution were labeled: *It's Up to Me*, *It's Up to Us*, and *It's Up to Leadership*. The *It's Up to Me* teachers accept the responsibility to create an inclusive environment and program for LGBTQ+ youth. The *It's Up to Us* teachers acknowledge the important collective role that students, teachers, and school and university leaders play in creating an inclusive classroom and program. The *It's Up to Leadership* teachers acknowledge a need for further education and training in LGBTQ+ inclusion and feel there is too much pressure placed on teachers to be inclusive. The attitudes describe the diverse understandings of how LGBTQ+ inclusion in agricultural education might be implemented and supported with the need for more education and resources in LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Keywords: *Q methodology, School-Based Agricultural Education, LGBTQ+, inclusion*

Across the United States, schools are often hostile environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) youth resulting in these students avoiding school activities or school entirely (Kosciw et al., 2019). Research found that LGBTQ+ students had higher truancy, lower grades, greater possibility of not finishing high school, and lower intentions to attend a four-year college (Aragon et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2019, 2022). Aragon et al. (2014) asserted that school personnel must work to promote supportive school climates that offer academic and social development for all students. This is vital as students may see educational spaces as safe spaces away from home where their identities may not be supported by their families (Mayo, 2015). In addition, developing and promoting supportive school climates can be done through teachers reflecting on their attitudes toward LGBTQ+ students so as to not perpetuate the homophobic climate in schools, developing and instructing students through inclusive curriculum, utilizing Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), and implementing bullying and violence programs (Aragon et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2022). Classroom climate is comprised of four properties, including (1) interpersonal relationships among students, (2) relationships between students and their teachers, (3) students' relationships with the learning methods and the subjects, and (4) students' perceptions of the classroom structure (Fraser et al., 1982). The climate of schools and classrooms has been found to be important for the psychological and academic development of students (Ambrose et al., 2010; Fraser et al., 1982).

School-based agricultural education (SBAE) is provided through career and technical education throughout the U.S., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. SBAE is taught by more than 13,000 teachers at more than 8,000 schools (National FFA Organization, 2021). SBAE began in 1917 when the Smith-Hughes Act was passed in the United States

(National Association of Agricultural Educators, 2022). Today, BAE serves more than 800,000 students in grades seven through 12 across the United States (NAAE, 2022). Schools, and specifically SBAE programs, use the needs, interests, and activities of the community in which it resides as a framework for developing program delivery (Meyer, 2008; Phipps et al., 2008).

According to the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law (2019), 4.5% of U.S. adults identify as LGBTQ+, which could mean roughly 36,000 SBAE students nationwide and more than 1,100 students in Oklahoma identify as LGBTQ+, meaning research in LGBTQ+ and agricultural education involves thousands of students. The field of agricultural education struggles with how to recruit, support, retain, and teach diverse students and research of the LGBTQ+ community in agricultural education is rarely conducted and published (Murray et al., 2020).

The demographic of the country continues to change; as a result, teachers need to be able to effectively relate to a diverse population of students (Moore et al., 2001). While teacher preparation courses to address diversity issues have become of greater importance in recent years, the needs of LGBTQ+ youth are rarely included in the discussion leaving many U.S. teachers ill-prepared to teach LGBTQ+ youth (Clark, 2010; Talbert & Edwin, 2008). As such, Anderson (1997) posited that teachers have a professional responsibility to serve the needs of all students and specifically their LGBTQ+ students. LaVergne et al. (2011) reported that many preservice school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers are not enrolling in courses focused on diversity and multiculturalism during their undergraduate courses. Furthermore, Price and Edwards (2023) found preservice SBAE teachers were not gaining experiences during their teacher preparation programs that adequately prepared them for the diversity regarding LGBTQ+ students they may encounter as SBAE teachers.

Statement of the Problem

There is a need for research, policies, and programs that work to address the inclusiveness of SBAE programs of LGBTQ+ youth, but few studies regarding sexuality have been published in the major agriculture research journals (Murray et al., 2020). This study aims to address the lack of research by contributing to a better understanding of in-service SBAE teachers' attitudes toward the inclusivity of LGBTQ+ youth in agricultural education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes of in-service SBAE teachers toward the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in agricultural education. Increased information regarding teacher attitudes may help inform policies, resources, and training needed to address LGBTQ+ inclusion in agricultural education.

Methodology

Q methodology, which was developed by William Stephenson in 1935 and advanced by him in 1953, was chosen for this study. Q methodology reveals the subjective viewpoints of its participants (Brown 1980, 1993, 2008). This study implemented Q methodology to identify the attitudes of in-service SBAE teachers toward LGBTQ+ inclusion in agricultural education. Q methodology is useful in identifying these common viewpoints when the subject matter is complex and is often a matter of social conflict (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). This attribute of Q methodology is of importance for this study as the perceptions regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion and working with students with different sexual orientations is often uncomfortable for some SBAE teachers (Moore et al., 2001). Study procedures were approved by the university IRB.

Participants

Participants, or P set, in the study were 21 in-service SBAE teachers in Oklahoma. Brown (1980) noted Q methodology does not require a large sample size and should only be large enough to establish factors or viewpoints of which to describe and compare to one another. In other words, two or more viewpoints need to be present in a study or the P set would be enlarged. Participants were recruited by emailing a flyer to all current SBAE teachers in Oklahoma. Participants were given the option of an online (*Zoom*) or in-person meeting. Additionally, the researcher recruited participants at a state-wide agricultural education livestock exposition. Of note: The researcher received a phone call from one SBAE teacher who chastised the researcher, the purpose of the study, and the university for allowing a study with this content. No other follow-up was needed after notifying the IRB of the teacher who did not participate in the study.

Instrument Development

A concourse is a collection of all possible items related to a phenomenon usually created through statements of self-referent, encompassing thoughts related to the study subject (Brown, 1993; Stephenson, 1953). The phenomenon in this study was the opinions of SBAE teachers related to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ students in agricultural education classes. The concourse of more than 100 statements was collected from literature related to inclusion practices, social media, and informal interviews with colleagues and students known to the researchers. To sample the concourse to obtain a representative Q set, statements were organized by similarity, according to the principles of homogeneity (Brown, 1980). When putting the concourse statements in like groups, a 3x4 Fisher's Balanced Block Design emerged as a way to represent the relevant teacher opinions analysis. This design allowed for the organization of statements into four areas: professional development and training, classroom teaching and FFA program inclusion, building connections and support, and knowledge of LGBTQ+ characteristics and inclusion. Then, when reviewing the differences within each of the four groups, the statements were further organized

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according to three contexts: colleagues, self, and student. An example of the Fisher Balanced Block Design as used in the development of this Q set is shown in Figure 1.

Next, to ensure heterogeneity of statements within each of the 12 cells, duplicate statements were deleted, and statements were assured of self-reference and potential meaning to the sorter (Brown, 1980). Therefore, from the structure of the concourse, 38 statements were selected for the final Q set, to be sorted according to the instruction, "Which of these statements most represent your feelings toward LGBTQ+ inclusion in agricultural education?" The final 38-statement Q set is listed in Appendix A.

Standard sorting procedures (Watts & Stenner, 2012) were followed for participants to place statements in a record sheet of 11 columns with values of -5 to +5 with a statement frequency of 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 6, 4, 4, 3, 3, and 2. An optional demographic questionnaire was included with the statements and record sheet. Included on the demographic questionnaire were questions related to age, gender identity, sexual orientation, number of years teaching, teacher certification type, highest level of degree, and whether they had a family member or close friend who identified as LGBTQ+. The questionnaire also included an open-ended question about participants' thoughts regarding the statements and a space in which participants could leave their contact information for a follow-up interview.

McKeown and Thomas (2013) describe exemplar sorters as those participants whose sorts have the highest loading on only one factor. Post-sort interviews were conducted with participants identified as exemplar sorters on each of the three factors. These interviews collected qualitative data about the initial concepts identified in each factor.

Data Analysis

Twenty-one Q sorts were analyzed using KADE software (KADE, Version 1.2.1, 2020 by Shawn Banasick & Arfon Smith). Data analysis included the correlation of all sorts to each other resulting in a correlation matrix, factor

analysis procedures, and standard score calculation for each statement for each factor. The three-factor solution was organized by standard scores for interpretation of each factor array.

Findings

Of the 21 Oklahoma SBAE teachers between the ages of 22 and 63 who completed sorts for the study, 20 were traditionally certified teachers from a Oklahoma institution. One teacher was alternatively certified. Of the 21 sorts, 18 reached significance on only one factor. Three distinct attitudes were interpreted as *It's Up to Me*, *It's Up to Us*, and *It's Up to Leadership*. Six sorts defined *It's Up to Me*, eight sorts defined *It's Up to Us*, and four sorts defined *It's Up to Leadership*. Field notes, post-sort interview data, and arrangement of statements by their z-scores within each array were used to interpret the three attitudes. Appendix A includes the numbering of all of the statements with the array position, or column position, for each factor. The statements provided here support the interpretation of the factor array (Albright et al. 2019; Brown, 2019).

It's Up to Me

Of the six defining sorts for the *It's Up to Me* teachers, four identified as male and two identified as female, and all were between ages 22 and 36. All six participants identified as straight. Five of the participants reported having a friend or family member who is part of the LGBTQ+ community, and one reported not knowing anyone in the community.

The *It's Up to Me* teachers are not only supportive of creating a positive atmosphere for LGBTQ+ youth, but they consider it a responsibility of a good agricultural educator. See Table 1 for array positions for Statements 24, 25, 2, 20, and 18. They recognize that small efforts like using student-preferred pronouns can have a great effect in respecting students' individuality and encouraging students to be allies for each other, which also helps create inclusive environments in

Figure 1

The Fisher Balanced Block Design used for Q set Development

	Professional Development and Training	Classroom Teaching and FFA Program Inclusion	Building Connections and Support	Knowledge of LGBTQ+ Characteristics and Inclusion
Colleagues				
Student				
Self				

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and out of the classroom (Statements 29, 24, 35, 25, and 22). Teachers included in this attitude are aware of the changing population of students in their classroom and recognize that agricultural educators in all types of programs may be in a unique position to ensure LGBTQ+ students feel as supported as any other student in their program (Statements 2, 18, 10, and 17). The “Most Like Me” and “Most Unlike Me” statements for the *It’s Up to Me* teachers are shown in Table 1.

Teachers included within this attitude are noted for their emphasis on modeling for others and showcasing equality among all students. Teachers included in this attitude accept the responsibility to create inclusive classroom environments and perhaps serve as role models for how students and other teachers should support LGBTQ+ students (Statements 35, 25, 24, 18, and 10). While clearly comfortable with creating inclusive programs, teachers with this attitude believe these practices result in a program designed to ensure all students are welcomed equally (Statements 29, 24, and 17).

In a post-sort interview, Sorter 17 stressed the importance of teachers wanting to know and learn about all students, not just those who are LGBTQ+ stating, “Teachers have to want to learn more about their students in general, not just the LGBTQ+ ones.” Teachers with this attitude understand the importance of acknowledging and accepting the differences of all students, and the important job they have in ensuring students have a safe learning environment. “It’s extra and creates more stress, but it’s our job,” Sorter 17 said.

It’s Up to Me teachers realize agricultural education may provide an important space of acceptance for LGBTQ+ students, and they want to be here for it (Statements 2, 18, 5, and 10).

They believe students should be able to come to

agricultural education classes and programs for support and should feel safe. They recognize agricultural education programs in rural areas may provide a supportive environment for rural LGBTQ+ students who have limited inclusive opportunities (Statements 2, 18, and 10) and this issue should be a topic of discussion in the discipline (Statement 2).

Five of the six teachers included in this attitude reported having an LGBTQ+ friend or family member, which could provide supportive context for those with this attitude. Sorter 17 referenced this experience during a post-sort interview saying, “Having experience with LGBTQ+ individuals growing up has helped me prepare for teaching those students in a suburban school.” In field notes collected during Sorter 15’s sort, the teacher discussed a recent transformative experience with someone who is a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Sorter 15 stated, “Without this [LGBTQ+ experience], my views would have been very different just a year ago.”

It’s Up to Us

Of the eight defining sorts for the *It’s Up to Us* teachers, three identified as male and five identified as female, and all were between the ages of 23 and 40. One female participant and one male participant identified as gay, while the other six sorters in this attitude identified as straight. Six of the participants reported having a friend or family member who is part of the LGBTQ+ community, while two reported not knowing anyone in the community.

To *It’s Up to Us* teachers, part of being a good teacher is ensuring inclusivity in programming, respecting students as individuals, and helping students learn to work with their LGBTQ+ peers (Statements 24, 15, 27, 29, and 36). For

Table 1

Most Like Me and Most Unlike Me Statements for It’s Up to Me

No.	Statement	Array Position	z-score
Most Like Me Statements			
29	I believe students should be allowed to be themselves.	+5	2.11
24	A good ag teacher ensures their Program of Activities includes events that are welcoming to all students.	+5	2.06
35	Students should be allies for each other.	+4	1.69
25	It is my responsibility to integrate allyship into chapter FFA leadership events.	+4	1.22
22	A good teacher asks for and uses student-preferred gender pronouns.	+4	0.97
Most Unlike Me Statements			
2	LGBTQ+ inclusiveness is not an appropriate area of discussion for agricultural education.	-4	-1.67
18	LGBTQ+ youth can go other places outside of agricultural education for support.	-4	-1.27
5	My inability to be accepting of inclusivity holds back the reach of agricultural education.	-4	-1.19
10	Inclusive agricultural education programs are only possible in urban areas.	-5	-1.94
17	I believe LGBTQ+ youth should receive more support than their heterosexual peers.	-5	-2.09

Note. Bold indicates distinguishing statements

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these teachers, any potential feeling of discomfort or notion of being forced to set aside their own beliefs is outweighed by the prioritization of their students (Statements 24, 29, 27, 8, and 14). Additionally, while these teachers clearly value inclusivity as a hallmark of a good teacher, their attitude is likely heavily shaped by their interactions with members of the LGBTQ+ community, and they know they can ask for help (See Table 2 for Statements 24, 15, 27, and 34). The “Most Like Me” and “Most Unlike Me” statements for the *It’s Up to Us* teachers are shown in Table 2.

Teachers included within this attitude are noted for their ability to recognize the power and impact of students and teachers coming together to support LGBTQ+ youth, bringing the issue to the forefront of the profession (Statements 21, 36, 24, and 29). Teachers with an *It’s Up to Us* attitude understand allyship and the importance of everyone supporting the need for inclusiveness in agricultural education. These teachers note the importance of a supportive environment not only among the students but also in the teaching profession. An inclusive atmosphere benefits all students (Statements 24, 29, and 36), and teachers with this attitude feel they have the support they need to create such an environment (Statements 15, 34, 21, and 5). For these teachers, “Us” may refer to the network of students, colleagues, or friends within the LGBTQ+ community (Statements 15, 25, 36, and 34).

It’s Up to Us teachers recognize the potential for growth regarding the inclusion of LGBTQ+ students in agricultural education (Statements 13, 16, 31, 28, and 37), as they recognize not all students may feel welcome and districts offer varying levels of support. Teachers with this attitude may value the lasting impacts of a supportive environment for

all students within the agricultural industry. During a post-sort interview, Sorter 3 spoke to the need of not excluding anyone for the benefit of the agricultural industry, “If [students] feel marginalized in FFA and agricultural education, it is likely they won’t want to be a part of the agriculture industry after high school.” In a post-sort interview, Sorter 12 stated, “Bringing attention to the issue is the first step.” Additionally, Sorter 9 wrote on their demographic sheet, “We have a long way to go in terms of [diversity and inclusion] in agricultural education in Oklahoma.”

It’s Up to Leadership

Of the four defining sorts, three identified as male and one identified as female, and all were between ages 26 and 37. All four participants identified as straight. Three of the participants reported having a friend or family member who was part of the LGBTQ+ community, and one reported not knowing anyone in the community.

The *It’s Up to Leadership* teachers believe doing their jobs as a SBAE teachers is enough and being pushed to be more inclusive of LGBTQ+ youth in SBAE has gone too far (Statements 20, 24, 21, 14, and 37). They recognize the need for more education and training to be comfortable implementing inclusive pedagogy (Statements 3, 4, and 34). The “Most Like Me” and “Most Unlike Me” statements for the *It’s Up to Leadership* teachers are shown in Table 3.

It’s Up to Leadership teachers recognize the need for an inclusive program for all students and acknowledge the opportunity SBAE provides for LGBTQ+ students (Statements 24, 36, 29, 37, and 5). However, these teachers likely do not

Table 2

Most Like Me and Most Unlike Me Statements for *It’s Up to Us*

No.	Statement	Array Position	z-score
Most Like Me Statements			
24	A good ag teacher ensures their Program of Activities includes events that are welcoming to all students.	+5	1.71
15	My interactions with other LGBTQ+ individuals helped shape the lens through which I see my students.	+5	1.55
29	I believe students should be allowed to be themselves.	+4	1.47
36	My students need to know how to work with LGBTQ+ peers.	+4	1.38
34	I know others I can ask for help regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion.	+4	1.25
Most Unlike Me Statements			
21	I feel the push for being inclusive in the classroom has gone too far.	-4	-1.33
5	My inability to be accepting of inclusivity holds back the reach of agricultural education.	-4	-1.34
27	It is difficult to wrap my mind around being open minded and supportive of all students and their choices.	-4	-1.42
8	Why sign up to be a teacher just to be put in uncomfortable situations regarding sexual orientation and students?	-5	-1.48
14	It is unfair that I am being asked to set aside my own beliefs to focus on what makes students feel most comfortable.	-5	-1.76

Note. Bold indicates distinguishing statements

Table 3

Most Like Me and Most Unlike Me Statements for It's Up to Leadership

No.	Statement	Array Position	z-score
Most Like Me Statements			
20	If I'm doing my job, my students' sexual orientation does not matter.	+5	2.12
24	A good ag teacher ensures their Program of Activities includes events that are welcoming to all students.	+5	1.89
36	My students need to know how to work with LGBTQ+ peers.	+4	1.47
29	I believe students should be allowed to be themselves.	+4	1.28
21	I feel the push for being inclusive in the classroom has gone too far.	+4	1.22
Most Unlike Me Statements			
30	The success of LGBTQ+ students is hindered in agricultural education.	-4	-1.28
37	LGBTQ+ youth can go other places outside of agricultural education for support.	-4	-1.47
10	My inability to be accepting of inclusivity holds back the reach of agricultural education.	-4	-1.47
7	I believe LGBTQ+ youth should receive more support than their heterosexual peers.	-5	-1.61
5	Inclusive agricultural education programs are only possible in urban areas.	-5	-1.67

Note. Bold indicates distinguishing statements

prioritize inclusion strategies that would seemingly promote any one student over another (Statements 21, 7, 1, 28, 30, and 25). Sorter 16, in a post-sort interview, described their thoughts on creating an inclusive program, "It's all about how a person grew up. I view LGBTQ+ as another person equal to me. They are not ranked higher or lower; a human is a human."

Some *It's Up to Leadership* teachers, while valuing ideas of inclusiveness for all students, may view efforts to prioritize LGBTQ+ students as unfair to other students and an affront to their own beliefs (Statements 14, 21, 10, 7, and 25). Sorter 13 echoed this pressure during a post-sort interview stating, "Sometimes it is too much. Sometimes it's all we focus on." Similarly, the demand placed on SBAE teachers to be inclusive was expressed in a written statement by Sorter 11, "We can support and love all students without being vocal on this issue."

It's Up to Leadership teachers do not see rural agricultural education programs as less welcoming for LGBTQ+ students and note the need for students to learn to work together in diverse settings; however, they may not recognize the direct integration of allyship initiatives as a priority for their SBAE program activities (Statements 25, 36, 37, and 24). Initiatives to provide ongoing training in creating inclusive classrooms may be of interest to these teachers as they may feel unprepared or lack confidence in their abilities to address issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion (Statements 3, 4, 33, 1, 16, and 9). Sorter 13 expressed the need for training stating, "I need access to more resources to aid me in supporting LGBTQ+ youth, but I would rather be able to access them online on my own rather than attending a workshop focused on the topic."

Consensus Statement

While the *It's Up to Me*, *It's Up to Us*, and *It's Up to Leadership* attitudes differ, all three share the perception regarding training and education in teacher preparation concerning support for LGBTQ+ youth. Consensus statements are statements that achieve homogeneity across all factor arrays (Brown, 1980). While the array position is similar across all attitudes, the meaning of the statement for each is unique for each attitude. For example, the statement "My agricultural education teacher preparation program left me ill-prepared to support LGBTQ+ youth" received a similar placing among all attitudes (array positions 1,1,3). *It's Up to Me* teachers are confident in their inclusion strategies. *It's Up to Us* teachers value a network of support that may strengthen inclusion efforts. Teachers with an *It's Up to Leadership* attitude also look to create inclusive programs but may struggle with how to do so outside of their teacher preparation training.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of in-service SBAE teachers toward the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in agricultural education. Results from the study indicated three distinct attitudes of in-service SBAE teachers regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion in agricultural education: *It's Up to Me*, *It's Up to Us*, and *It's Up to Leadership*.

Those teachers with an *It's Up to Me* attitude toward LGBTQ+ inclusivity in agricultural education consider themselves role models. This is important as teachers and students navigate a changing school population (Clark, 2010). That role-model mindset is demonstrated in front

of their students, other teachers, and school leaders to intentionally create a welcoming environment that evokes equality among all students. Teachers with this attitude believe part of their responsibility as classroom educators is to create an inclusive environment in which all students feel welcome. Being a role model of inclusivity can help mitigate a homophobic school climate (Aragon et al., 2014). As a role model, these teachers believe their students should be able to come to the SBAE program for support in addition to other areas of the school or community, supporting the assertion of Mayo (2014) that schools can be a safe space for those students who may not have support anywhere else at school or at home. The relationships among students and between teachers and students was identified as a property of classroom climate by Fraser et al. (1982) and is seen as an important responsibility of these teachers. As they work to create a Program of Activities that is inclusive of all students, they also strive to use inclusive language, such as gender pronouns of the students' choices, to create a positive classroom environment.

Teachers with an *It's Up to Us* attitude understand the importance of creating a welcoming environment and value doing so within a supportive network. Teachers with this attitude note the long-term impacts of creating inclusive classrooms. The impact of creating inclusive classrooms can be seen in their students through improved academic achievement and less truancy (Aragon et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2019, 2022) as well as in the agricultural industry through increased involvement of LGBTQ+ youth in the industry post-graduation (Elliott-Engel et al., 2020). *It's Up to Us* teachers acknowledge their role as an educator in creating classroom environments that are inclusive regardless of what the rest of the school or program climate may portray (Mayo, 2014).

It's Up to Me and *It's Up to Us* both recognize the role their explicit allyship in the classroom has in making their LGBTQ+ students feel welcomed and supported. This explicit allyship is noted of great importance by Elliott-Engel et al. (2020). Austin et al. (2021), stated that SBAE teachers should make a conscious effort to ensure each of their students develop cultural humility and gain skills and understanding regarding inclusion. SBAE teachers with these attitudes believe it to be a professional responsibility to help students develop these skills. The teachers in the *It's Up to Me* and *It's Up to Us* groups believe in their professional responsibility to make all students feel welcome despite their personal beliefs, which is identified by Anderson (1997) as a core responsibility of educators.

Teachers with an *It's Up to Leadership* attitude were less comfortable with the topic of LGBTQ+ inclusivity, as they may feel there is too much pressure placed on SBAE teachers to be inclusive of one specific group in their programs. Those with this attitude may benefit from district-approved materials to implement strategies in their classrooms as they may feel ill-prepared to make their classrooms and programs more inclusive for LGBTQ+ students. Similarly, Murray et al. (2020) wrote that policies regarding acceptable inclusivity practices are needed within agricultural education. As a group that is focused on doing the job and letting students be who they are without bringing attention to differences, this group may benefit from programming and resources developed by

affiliate or partner organizations they are already using to complete their job responsibilities, such as the National FFA Organization, career and technical education departments, and other classroom resource and curriculum providers.

All three attitudes value the creation of inclusive agricultural education programs as a responsibility of agricultural education teachers. Additionally, all three recognize the importance of allowing students to be themselves. Differences are noted, however, in teachers' confidence in creating such environments and what it means to truly be "inclusive." Just as racial minorities and people with disabilities have been increasingly included in school curriculum in recent years (Aragon et al., 2014), LGBTQ+ representation should be included in curriculum as well. For example, Aragon et al. (2014) suggested incorporating positive examples of LGBTQ+ history, events, and people in curriculum to allow non-LGBTQ+ students to consider more positive representation of their LGBTQ+ peers.

Approved inclusivity curriculum and policies to support LGBTQ+ youth in schools is needed to positively affect LGBTQ+ students' school experience (Aragon et al., 2020; Kosciw et al., 2022; Murray et al., 2020; Russel et al., 2010). In addition, collaboration with community groups focused on LGBTQ+ advocacy and support could be utilized to create more inclusive classrooms as supported by Phipps et al. (2008). SBAE programs should reflect the needs and activities of the communities in which they reside (Phipps et al., 2008). Listening and focus groups with local LGBTQ+ support groups in the community can help teachers and school leaders to better understand the unique perspectives and experiences of LGBTQ+ students and families within the school system. In addition to collaboration with community groups, it is recommended that SBAE teachers seek opportunities for their student organization leaders to work alongside gender and sexuality-affirming groups within the school building, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs). The presence of these groups has been shown to reduce anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric within schools (Aragon et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2022), and can be utilized to bridge the inclusivity gap in SBAE programs.

Teacher preparation, ongoing education, and professional development opportunities should be provided and implemented in various formats for educators to increase their understanding of their LGBTQ+ students. Examples of such training could be a more representative teacher preparation curriculum, more professional development focused on serving LGBTQ+ students and offering online courses for in-service SBAE teachers who are not likely to sign up for an in-person event. Findings from this study support the results of Price and Edwards (2023) that some SBAE teacher preparation programs are not providing the necessary experiences or formal education for preservice teachers to gain the knowledge and understanding to adequately serve their LGBTQ+ students using inclusive language. This implies the need for experiences related to situations specific to LGBTQ+ students in SBAE programs to better prepare future educators.

Professional development opportunities might differ for teachers with different attitudes regarding the inclusion of LGBTQ+ youth in SBAE. For teachers with the *It's Up to Me*

attitude, effective professional development should focus on furthering their confidence and understanding of LGBTQ+ youth, and how their classrooms can continue to be more inclusive. The Safe Zone Project (2023) training or similar programs should be offered to teachers with this attitude to further their allyship capabilities.

Teachers with the *It's Up to Us* attitude would benefit most from learning how they can create inclusive programming throughout their SBAE program and schools. Workshops focused on how to foster relationships and collaborations with their local GSA organization and other inclusive student organizations would be beneficial for these teachers who look to work with others to create inclusive environments.

Teachers with the *It's Up to Leadership* attitude might be provided with opportunities and resources that can be accessed in their own time and without having to attend them in person. These activities might focus on assisting these teachers with understanding what a truly inclusive environment looks like, and the small steps they can take to make their LGBTQ+ students feel more supported in their classrooms.

It is important to note that during the development of this manuscript, many state legislatures enacted laws that may have made many of these recommendations illegal to implement in teacher preparation, professional development, and secondary school curriculum. Specifically, the 2023 legislative session nationwide included the proposal of nearly 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills, of which 77 were enacted (ACLU, 2023). However, we found it important to retain the recommendations within the manuscript to provide greater understanding as to the diversity of perspectives and needs of educators in a polarized political climate.

As state legislatures look to convene again, it may be presumed similar bills will be re-introduced. Educators seeking to create safe spaces for their LGBTQ+ students within legal parameters will do so in different ways and may benefit from various professional educative techniques. For example, teachers with *It's Up to Me* attitude, may seek to continue to serve as a role model for students and create programs that allow students to be their authentic selves. However, education will be important for these teachers to ensure they are advocating and supporting their LGBTQ+ students within the laws and regulations. Those with the *It's Up to Us* attitude may seek a support system of LGBTQ+ individuals or organizations to develop and implement inclusive practices within legal boundaries. *It's Up to Leadership* teachers may need focused education and training, including materials they can access on their own, about laws enacted or proposed impact their classrooms and their ability to do their jobs, as they may not seek the education on their own.

Further research is needed to gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions and actions regarding inclusion. Specifically, more research should be conducted regarding the *It's Up to Leadership* attitude to better understand the pressure they feel is placed on them, and what resources they would be willing to use if provided by leadership. Findings from this study led to the recommendation that teacher preparation institutions evaluate their programs regarding the preparedness of their students to support LGBTQ+ inclusion in SBAE. This study sought to describe the attitudes of

SBAE teachers regarding this topic of inclusion of LGBTQ+ students; however, further research should investigate perspectives of students in SBAE regarding how inclusive they observe SBAE to be for LGBTQ+ youth. This student perspective is needed to identify the level of representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in agriculture, which is important to encourage youth to enter higher education and careers in agricultural fields (Elliott-Engel et al., 2020).

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**Appendix
Three Factor Array Data by Statement**

Number	Statement	Factor 1 Array Position	Factor 2 Array Position	Factor 3 Array Position
1	The more we include one group the more we exclude another.	0	-3	1
2	LGBTQ+ inclusiveness is not an appropriate area of discussion for agricultural education.	-4	-2	0
3	I need ongoing training to better understand the issues LGBTQ+ youth face.	-1	2	3
4	My agricultural education teacher preparation program has left me ill-prepared to support LGBTQ+ youth.	1	1	3
5	My inability to be accepting of inclusivity holds back the reach of agricultural education.	-4	-4	-5
6	Just because LGBTQ+ youth are uncomfortable doesn't mean they are unsafe.	2	-1	2
7	I worry about how students will react if I include inclusive topics in class.	2	0	-5
8	Why sign up to be a teacher just to be put in uncomfortable situations regarding sexual orientation and students?	-2	-5	0
9	I need district-approved curriculum to present inclusive content so I know what is acceptable.	-3	0	1
10	Inclusive agricultural education programs are only possible in urban areas.	-5	-1	-4
11	I see there being adequate LGBTQ+ representation in agricultural education.	-3	-2	-1
12	In my experience, Ag teachers are less welcoming of LGBTQ+ youth compared to other teachers.	-1	1	0
13	I believe agricultural education provides a safe support network for LGBTQ+ students.	2	-3	-1
14	It is unfair that I am being asked to set aside my own beliefs to focus on what makes students feel most comfortable.	-3	-5	3
15	My interactions with other LGBTQ+ individuals helped shape the lens through which I see my students.	3	5	2
16	I could only work at a district that supports teachers' inclusion initiatives.	-1	0	-3
17	I believe LGBTQ+ youth should receive more support than their heterosexual peers.	-5	0	-3
18	LGBTQ+ youth can go other places outside of agricultural education for support.	-4	0	0
19	I cringe at making my students conform to FFA official dress standards that make them feel uncomfortable.	0	2	-3
20	If I'm doing my job, my students' sexual orientation does not matter.	3	1	5
21	I feel the push for being inclusive in the classroom has gone too far.	-2	-4	4
22	A good teacher asks for and uses student-preferred gender pronouns.	4	3	-1
23	Offending LGBTQ+ students is just one more thing I have to worry about.	1	-2	-2
24	A good ag teacher ensures their Program of Activities includes events that are welcoming to all students.	5	5	5
25	It is my responsibility to integrate allyship into chapter FFA leadership events.	4	3	0
26	My LGBTQ+ students need to advocate for themselves.	-2	-1	-1
27	It is difficult to wrap my mind around being open minded and supportive of all students and their choices.	-2	-4	-2
28	I would be ashamed to place rainbows in my room designating it as an LGBTQ+ safe place.	1	-3	2
29	I believe students should be allowed to be themselves.	5	4	4
30	The success of LGBTQ+ students is hindered in agricultural education.	0	2	-4

Appendix cont.

Number	Statement	Factor 1 Array Position	Factor 2 Array Position	Factor 3 Array Position
31	I believe LGBTQ+ students feel accepted in agricultural education.	0	-1	1
32	There is not enough time in the day to become an expert in inclusion.	0	0	0
33	I lack knowledge in LGBTQ+ inclusion.	0	1	2
34	I know others I can ask for help regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion.	2	4	-2
35	Students should be allies for each other.	4	3	1
36	My students need to know how to work with LGBTQ+ peers.	3	4	4
37	Rural agricultural education is a scary place for LGBTQ+ youth.	1	2	-4
38	Talking about inclusion makes me uncomfortable.	-1	-2	-2